



ST PETER'S COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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Dear Student,

First and foremost – congratulations! I am very much looking forward to working with you over the next few years.

In advance of our meeting in person in October, I thought that you might like to know a little about what awaits you in your first year of studying French at the University of Oxford. The essential details are available in the French Prelims handbook for 2022-23 (draft version attached, to be superseded by the final version when you arrive), but a gloss on this document and the practical arrangements that it entails may prove enlightening.

The first-year course is known as Prelims, so called in reference to the Preliminary examinations that you must pass at the end of the first year in order to continue with your degree. Generally speaking, these exams should not pose any particular problems if you have diligently completed the tasks required of you during the year. It is important to note that 'the year' includes periods when you are not resident in Oxford: it is vital that you undertake preparatory study (e.g. reading of primary texts) before term begins, as the volume of work during teaching weeks may otherwise be overwhelming.

The Prelims course comprises the study of both language and literature. While these components are entirely complementary (e.g. reading well-written French texts has enormous benefits for the quality of your own writing), I shall treat them separately below. Please note in what follows that there are no prescribed editions; I have recommended ones on the grounds of availability and price. For texts where there have been multiple re-editions (e.g. for dictionaries and grammar guides), the most recent edition is recommended. For the literary texts, you will need to obtain a copy of each of the prescribed works; for the language texts, I have made recommendations and suggestions on which you may act as you see fit. Useful outlets include www.amazon.co.uk, www.amazon.fr, and www.blackwell.co.uk.

Language

Papers and teaching

At the end of the first year, you will be examined in three language papers:

Paper I French Grammar, Translation, and Summary (3 hours), comprising:

1. Ten short sentences to translate into French, testing common points of grammar
2. Translation into French (also known as 'prose translation') of a passage of English (150-200 words)
3. Summary in French (150-180 words) of a passage of French (500-600 words) of a reflective, analytical or critical nature.

Your teaching for this will involve a weekly French language class.

Paper IIA Unprepared translation into English (90 minutes) involves a translation of a 250-word passage into English (= 'unseen');

Paper IIB Prepared translation into English from Prescribed Texts (90 minutes) involves translation into English of a passage of about 300 words from one of the texts set for Paper IV (see below), excluding the medieval text, *La Chastelaine de Vergi*.

Your teaching for these two 1.5-hour translation examinations will be centred on fortnightly 'unseen' translation classes.

There is also a statutory requirement to attend and participate actively in the **oral classes** which will be organised by the College. There is no oral examination for Prelims.

Reading and reference works

Dictionaries are an essential tool for your language study, and you will learn to use and compare numerous ones in libraries when preparing your work. On your shelf, it is essential to have a full (i.e. not 'concise' or 'mini') single-volume bilingual dictionary: Collins-Robert and Oxford-Hachette are both recommended. In due course, a single-volume monolingual dictionary will become an important acquisition: the *Petit Robert* is the default choice. For the purposes of building vocabulary rather than solely for reference, J. Duffy, *Using French Vocabulary* is also useful.

Grammar guides are equally indispensable. The Faculty recommends R. Hawkins and R. Towell, *French Grammar and Usage*; I also like G. Price, *A Comprehensive French Grammar* (somewhat more detailed and traditional – I must also confess bias, given that Price is a fellow philologist and medievalist). Relatively concise and traditional, but still worthy, is H. Ferrar, *A French Reference Grammar*. It would be remiss of me not to mention the guide by another fellow medievalist, M. Jubb, *French Grammar in Context*. For verb morphology, *Bescherelle: La Conjugaison pour tous* is very handy. For general points of grammar and style, M. Grevisse, *Le Bon Usage* may be an investment to which you may eventually aspire, as funds permit.

While the above recommendations deal with the practical use of language, you may also benefit from, or subsequently wish to pursue, the study of **French linguistics**. Useful general introductions to aspects of morphology, syntax, and phonology include R.A. Lodge et al., *Exploring the French Language*, and S. Fagyal et al., *French: a Linguistic Introduction*. Specifically on phonology, G. Price, *An Introduction to French Pronunciation* is good, while for an overview of the development of the French language, P. Rickard, *A History of the French Language* remains a very accessible introduction. Prelims does not feature any assessment of competence in linguistics, but basic study in the area is still a good investment of effort: if speaking and writing French is like using a tool, studying French linguistics is akin to reading the accompanying instruction manual.

Literature

At the end of the first year, you will sit two literature papers:

Paper III Short Texts culminates in a 3-hour examination in which you will write three critical commentaries, on your choice of three of the following four texts:

1. Montaigne, 'Des cannibales', in *Essais: 'Des cannibales', 'Des coches'*, ed. M. Tarpinian (Paris: Editions-Ellipses, 1994)
2. Racine, *Phèdre*, ed. R. Picard (Paris: Gallimard, 2015)
3. Verlaine, *Romances sans paroles*, ed. A. Bernadet (Paris : Garnier-Flammarion, 2018)
4. NDiaye, *Papa doit manger* (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 2003)

We will devote two tutorials (one each week) to each of these texts, focussing on close reading and commentary technique. These eight weeks of study will cover all of Michaelmas Term (Term 1). You should therefore focus your preparatory reading before October on these four texts. There will be Faculty lectures on these texts in Michaelmas Term, as well as lectures on techniques of versification.

Paper IV French Narrative Fiction culminates in a 3-hour examination involving essays on three of four texts:

1. *La Chastelaine de Vergy*, ed. J. Dufournet and L. Dulac, folio classique (Paris: Gallimard, 1994)
2. Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, folio classique (Paris: Gallimard, 2006)
3. Sand, *Indiana*, folio classique (Paris: Gallimard, 1984)
4. Condé, *Traversée de la mangrove*, folio (Paris: Gallimard, 1992)

Again, we will devote two tutorials, one per week, to each text, with these eight weeks filling Hilary Term (Term 2). The Faculty will also offer lectures on these texts.

For those of you whose degree includes elements other than French, you may stop reading now (or jump forward to the valediction). For those of you taking French Sole, however, there is a little more...

French Sole only

French Sole students take three further papers, the teaching for which is delivered centrally (i.e. you will attend seminars and lectures organised by the Faculty for you and other French Sole students, and will not be taught for these papers in College). Again, I have included the centrally produced material describing this course, which I summarise below:

Paper XI Introduction to French Film Studies culminates in a 3-hour examination in which you will answer questions relating to three of the four prescribed films:

1. Henri-Georges Clouzot, *Le Corbeau* (1942)
2. Jean-Luc Godard, *Vivre sa vie* (1962)
3. Agnès Varda, *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000)
4. Bertrand Blier, *Les Valseuses* (1974)

Teaching takes place in Michaelmas Term, during which you will have to prepare three essays and one seminar presentation. Useful introductory reading includes:

- A. Williams, *Republic of Images: History of French Filmmaking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992)
M. Temple and M. Witt (eds), *The French Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2004)
D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004)

Paper XIII Key Texts in French Thought culminates in a 3-hour examination entailing one commentary and two essays on three of the following:

1. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, ed. L. Renault (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 2000)
2. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, ed. J. Starobinski (Paris: Folio, 1989)
3. Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: PUF, 1988) [Chapters I and II only]
4. Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme, suivi de Discours sur la Négritude* (Paris: Présence Africaine: 2004)

Teaching will take place during Michaelmas Term (Weeks 5-8) and Hilary Term (Weeks 1-4). You will again be expected to prepare three pieces of written work and one seminar presentation.

Paper XII Introduction to French Literary Theory involves a 3-hour examination in which you will answer questions dealing with three of the following:

1. Valéry, 'Questions de poésie' and 'Poésie et pensée abstraite', in *Théorie poétique et esthétique*, part of *Variété*, in *Œuvres*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), vol. 1, pp. 1280-93, 1314-39 [will be made available electronically]
2. Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Folio, 2001) [Sections I and II only]
3. Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1999)
4. Cixous, 'Le rire de la Méduse' in *Le rire de la Méduse et autres ironies*, ed. F. Regard (Paris: Galilée, 2010)

Teaching takes place in Hilary Term (Weeks 5-8) and Trinity Term (Weeks 1-4), and again entails three essays and one seminar presentation.

I hope that the above is all relatively self-explanatory, but if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email me: daron.burrows@spc.ox.ac.uk.

With all best wishes for an enjoyable and productive rest of summer,

